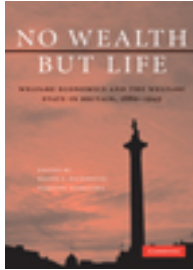


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Chapter

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EIGHT

‘The Great Educator of Unlikely People’

H. G. Wells and the Origins of the Welfare State

Richard Toye

H. G. Wells’s novel *The New Machiavelli* (1911) contains some notable criticisms of the Edwardian Liberal party. The hero, Richard Remington, is elected as Liberal MP in 1906, but becomes disillusioned with the party and with ‘our self-satisfied new Liberalism and Progressivism’. Of the Liberals themselves he says mockingly: ‘It was tremendously clear what they were against. The trouble was to find out what on earth they were *for*!’ (Wells 1911, II, pp. 31, 20). Commended as ‘the equal of any political novel in the English language’ (Clarke 1996, p. 40), it has also been described as ‘an anti-Liberal tract’ (Cowling 1985, p. 216). That interpretation might seem to be a natural one, given that, in his extensive nonfiction political writings, Wells is generally thought to have presented ‘a fundamentally socialist doctrine of reform’ (Hyde 1956, p. 217).¹ Believing that ‘the creation of Utopias – and their exhaustive criticism – is the proper and distinctive method of sociology’, he put much effort into describing the ideal society (Wells 1916). His earliest and best-known attempt at this was *A Modern Utopia* (1905a), which described an idyllic World State ruled over by ‘voluntary noblemen’ known as ‘Samurai’. Therefore, much as Wells has been hailed for his penetrating satirical comments on the Edwardian social-sexual-political

¹ This assumption permeates, amongst other works, Feir 2005.

I am grateful to the editors and also to the other participants at the conference on ‘Welfare Economics and the Welfare State in Britain, 1884–1951’ at Hitotsubashi University in March 2006. Their comments and suggestions proved valuable. John S. Partington has given me insightful comments and has provided me with a wealth of useful information. Peter Clarke also provided helpful information. Any errors that remain are of course my own responsibility.

milieu, it might seem that he was, mentally speaking, almost on a different planet from the practical-minded men who designed the pre-1914 welfare reforms. Yet Wells undoubtedly had a significant impact on key New Liberal reformers. As will be seen, Winston Churchill's debt to *A Modern Utopia* forms the clearest instance of this, but Wells also has a claim to have influenced other politicians, including David Lloyd George and Charles Masterman, who were closely involved with the birth of the welfare state. C. P. Snow (1967, p. 57), the scientist and author, was quite right to describe Wells as 'The great educator of unlikely people'.

This chapter provides the evidence for that influence. It must be remembered, of course, that intellectual factors were only part of the stimulus to reform. Demographic, institutional, and political pressures – including the rise of the Labour Party, and the challenge posed to the Liberal government by the power of the House of Lords – were undoubtedly crucial. Equally, Wells's thought needs to be considered alongside that of a number of other figures if its true significance is to be understood. It is *not* argued here that the 'classic' New Liberal thinkers, T. H. Green, D. G. Ritchie, J. A. Hobson and L. T. Hobhouse were less influential on politicians than has been traditionally assumed. It is merely noted that, whereas the evidence for *their* influence is often circumstantial and ambiguous, it can be shown in a very concrete way that MPs and ministers were reading Wells, paying attention to his ideas, and sometimes even quoting him in speeches. This makes us realise the importance, when examining 'welfare' in the broadest sense (as in the present volume), of taking a similarly broad approach in selecting our sources. It is important not to assume – as some scholars in fact seem to have done – that Wells's imaginative works can be read as a straightforward presentation of his views on politics and society. But politicians' reactions to them can tell us much about their own attitudes, and, therefore, they deserve to be added to the repertoire of treatises, pamphlets, journalism and periodical literature on which historians of political and economic thought conventionally draw.

Expanding the range of sources on which we draw forces us to think hard about the nature of intellectual influence and the extent to which it is ever possible to prove that one thinker influenced another. Quentin Skinner suggests that, in order to demonstrate the influence of writer A on writer B, the following conditions would have to be met: '(i) that B is known to have studied A's works; (ii) that B could not have found the relevant doctrines in any other writer than A; and (iii) that B could not have arrived at the relevant doctrines independently'. (Skinner (2002, pp. 75–6)

acknowledges that test (iii) could perhaps never be passed, and it might be added that test (ii) is also an extremely difficult one. Let us consider the case of Hobson's influence on Lloyd George and Churchill, which is generally accepted (see, for example, Chapter 4 by Martin Daunton). The evidence for that influence rests principally on the similarities between Hobson's arguments and those of the politicians concerned. Historians seeking to show Hobson's influence have drawn attention to the fact that some contemporaries noted these similarities at the time. Peter Clarke, for example, draws on articles published in *The Nation*. Thus Hobson's book *The Industrial System* (1909) was described by the paper as 'a theoretical exposition of the principles of democratic finance at the very moment at which Mr. Lloyd George has been administering a practical demonstration' via the People's Budget (Clarke 1978, p. 115, quoting *The Nation*, 29 May 1909). Similarly, Clarke writes that 'Churchill's Leicester speech of 5 September 1909 was almost purely Hobsonian'. He also attributes to Hobson an article in the *Nation* which described Churchill's book, *Liberalism and the Social Problem* (1909), as "'the clearest, most eloquent, and most convincing exposition" of the new Liberalism' (ibid., p. 117, quoting *The Nation*, 27 November 1909). This evidence demonstrates *affinities* between Hobson's thinking and that of Lloyd George and Churchill. It does not, however, establish that any of Skinner's three tests have been met. This does not mean that we should reject the idea of Hobson's influence on politicians out of hand. Yet, if we are willing to accept it we should be all the more ready to take seriously the claims of authors who meet the tests in full or in part. As will be seen, this is the case with Wells.

H. G. Wells (1866–1946) was born in quite humble circumstances in Bromley, Kent. During his youth he worked for spells as a draper's apprentice, as a pharmacist's assistant and as a pupil-teacher – experiences on which he later drew in his fiction – before at last securing a place at London's Normal School of Science. There he studied for a brief period under T. H. Huxley ('Darwin's bulldog'), who was to be a great influence on his thought. However, Wells's academic career did not live up to its early promise, and he instead made his name during the 1890s as the author of 'scientific romances' or, as he preferred it, 'fantasias of possibility' (Preface to Wells 1921). Many of these works had political undertones. For example, in the future portrayed in *The Time Machine* (1895), humans have evolved into two separate species, the placid, unintelligent Eloi and the subterranean Morlocks who treat them as prey. Wells intended this as a story of the degeneration that might occur if

mankind did not work together for the good of the whole species (Smith 1986, p. 49). (One might see an echo of the tale in the 1909 speech in which Churchill spoke of the ‘dual degeneration which comes from the simultaneous waste of extreme wealth and extreme want’ – speech of 4 September 1909, in James 1981, p. 174.)

At the turn of the century, although he did not abandon science fiction, Wells’s work moved in two new directions. He published *Love and Mr. Lewisham* (1900), which he followed up with other ‘social’ novels including *Kipps* (1905b), *Tono-Bungay* (1909a) and *Ann Veronica* (1909b). At the same time he moved into social and political writing, beginning with *Anticipations of the Reaction of Mechanical and Scientific Progress Upon Human Life and Thought* (1901), which was followed by *Mankind in the Making* (1903) and then *A Modern Utopia*. These years also saw his involvement with the Fabian Society, which he joined in 1903 and from which he resigned in 1908, following a drawn-out battle with the Society’s ‘old gang’. After a brief marriage and divorce in his twenties he had wed again, but went on to have a string of affairs, with Amber Reeves and Rebecca West amongst others. This is worth mentioning because it affected his public reputation at the time and the way in which his ideas were received in Liberal circles.

There is a strong case for saying that Wells, during the Edwardian era, viewed himself as a Liberal and hoped to devise a ‘new Liberalism’ to ‘supersede the chaotic good intentions that constitute contemporary Liberalism’ (H. G. Wells to W. T. Stead, 31 October 1901, quoted in Baylen 1974, p. 61). I have laid out that case in depth elsewhere; the present chapter is primarily concerned with how Wells’s ideas were received (Toye 2008). However, a few points about his attitude need to be emphasised. To begin with, he saw socialism and liberalism as compatible, indeed as two sides of the same coin. This divided him from some other socialists, such as George Bernard Shaw, who saw them as irreconcilable. It also meant that, even though he was no conventional party man, he thought it desirable for socialists to cooperate with the Liberal Party. His operating assumption before 1914 was that no labour or socialist party had any hope of gaining a parliamentary majority within the foreseeable future. Therefore, if socialists wanted to achieve anything, they needed to ‘contemplate a working political combination between the Socialist members in Parliament’ and the ‘non-capitalist section of the Liberal Party’ (Wells 1908b). This is obviously significant when trying to explain how it was that radical or ‘advanced’ Liberals welcomed some of his ideas. They were clearly likely to react more warmly to a

socialist who deprecated 'fanatical anti-Liberalism', and who believed that Liberals should in some cases be supported against 'wild' socialist candidates at by-elections, than to one who was prepared to risk antagonising them (Wells 1908c, pp. 252, 255).

Before we look at how Liberals received Wells's work, we need to take note of the substance of his two books that proved to be particularly important. *A Modern Utopia* sought to apply the insights of biological evolution to human society. In the book, Wells rejected the idea of creating a permanent blueprint for a new society in the way that he claimed that Utopian writers had always done pre-Darwin. Much of the emphasis was on experiment and progressive development; Utopia would be 'kinetic' rather than 'static'. There was also, of course, the 'Samurai' concept. Any man or woman could be admitted to this governing elite provided they agreed to follow its self-disciplinary rules. In Utopia, moreover, many problems that were normally considered to be economic ones were to be studied instead within the field of psychology. Like Hobson and other contemporaries (see Chapter 6 by Backhouse) Wells was dismissive of conventional economics, which, he argued, was in thrall to the belief that society was composed of avaricious individuals who were only interested in maximising personal utility.

Upon such quicksands rose an edifice that aped the securities of material science, developed a technical jargon and professed the discovery of 'laws'. Our liberation from these false presumptions through the rhetoric of Carlyle and Ruskin and the activities of the Socialists, is more apparent than real. The old edifice oppresses us still, repaired and altered by indifferent builders, underpinned in places, and with a slight change of name. 'Political Economy' has been painted out, and instead we read 'Economics – under entirely new management'. (Wells 1905a, pp. 89–90)

In spite of its utopianism, the book did include a number of suggestions that were capable of practical application in the here and now. For example, in Utopia, 'the State will insure the children of every citizen, and those legitimately dependent upon him, against the inconvenience of his death [...] and it will insure him against old age and infirmity' (Wells 1905a, pp. 99–100). The book did not use the term 'welfare state', a term that was not yet in currency,² but it did place great emphasis on child welfare. It also envisaged a minimum wage, labour exchanges and contracyclical public works:

² However, the term 'Social State' was used in at least one pre-war Liberal pamphlet: R. Rea, *Social reform versus socialism* (1912), quoted in Garland 1985, p. 232.

All over the world the labour exchanges will be reporting the fluctuating pressure of economic demand and transferring workers from this region of excess to that of scarcity; and whenever the excess is universal, the World State – failing an adequate development of private enterprise – will either reduce the working day and so absorb the excess, or set on foot some permanent special works of its own, paying the minimum wage and allowing them to progress just as slowly or just as rapidly as the ebb and flow of labour dictated. (Wells 1905a, pp. 153–4)

Wells was not, of course, the first person to think of such ideas, but his proposals had some obvious similarities with the reforms implemented by the Liberal government after 1906.³ As will be seen, this may have been more than coincidence.

Tono-Bungay, by contrast, was not a prescriptive work, but a ‘Condition of England’ novel, which is reckoned by some (a little implausibly) to represent the height of Wells’s creative achievement (MacKenzie and MacKenzie 1973, p. 243). It is the tale of the rise and fall of Edward Ponderevo, a patent medicine king, as narrated by George Ponderevo, his nephew and sometime right-hand man; ‘Tono-Bungay’ is the ‘slightly injurious rubbish’ that they bottle and sell to a gullible public (Wells 1909a, p. 120). The follies of capitalist affluence form the book’s great theme. George Ponderevo notes towards the end that he has called his story *Tono-Bungay*, ‘but I had far better have called it Waste’. It was ‘the story of a country hectic with a wasting aimless fever of trade and money-making and pleasure-seeking’ (ibid., p. 83). (Earlier in the book a procession of the unemployed is described as ‘the gutter waste of competitive civilisation’. – ibid., p. 194.) Here was Ruskin’s concept of ‘illth’ – the opposite of wealth – writ large.⁴ And this was what resonated with a number of New Liberals.

How did Wells’s thinking about society, wealth and welfare fit in with the intellectual currents of the time? He had some significant affinities with many thinkers who are typically placed into the New Liberal category, although these should not be overstated.⁵ Anne Fremantle has observed, in passing, that there were similarities between Green’s conception of the state and Wells’s (Fremantle 1960, p. 149). This is certainly true at a rather general level, given that Wells could surely have endorsed Green’s view of it as ‘the sustainer and harmoniser of social relations’ (Green 2002, p. 105). Wells was familiar with Green’s concept

³ Hyde (1956, p. 227) touches on this point but does not develop it.

⁴ Wells had a somewhat ambivalent attitude to Ruskin, but he did give him credit for having attacked the ‘tyrannous and dogmatic’ assumptions of political economy: 1908a, p. 239. See also Wells 1903, p. 156.

⁵ We may also note that there are a few traces in his work of the influence of Mill: McLean 2007.

of 'positive' versus 'negative' freedom. 'Individual liberty in a community is not, as mathematicians would say, always of the same sign', as *A Modern Utopia* puts it. 'To ignore this is the essential fallacy of the cult called Individualism' (Wells 1905a, pp. 41–2). Yet the similarities between Wells and, later, more radical New Liberal thinkers – who, unlike Green, were heavily influenced by evolutionary discourse (Freeden 1978, pp. 19, 76–116) – were much more marked.

There is no evidence that Wells had any direct influence on Hobhouse or vice versa; and, unlike Wells, Hobhouse did not believe that devising utopias was a valid method of social science (Meadowcroft 1994, p. 82). Nevertheless, there were some important likenesses between the two men's ideas. They both believed that there was no necessary contradiction between individualism and collectivism, and they had similar views on social evolution. Both believed in a broad scheme of human progress, the purpose of which the human mind could grasp and thus help bring about. For Hobhouse this was 'a development of organic harmony', and for Wells it was the 'development of a common general idea, a common general purpose out of a present confusion' (Hobhouse 1913, p. 372; Wells 1929 [1908], pp. 58–9). There were also many points of overlap between Wells's ideas and those of the Oxford philosopher D. G. Ritchie, who was influenced by Green and Darwin, among others. In 1893 – the year before he was appointed to a professorship at St. Andrew's – Ritchie broke with the Fabian Society when it appeared that it might abandon permeation and create an independent party instead. This prefigured Wells's own dispute with the society. Like Wells, he argued that the theory of evolution pointed not to laissez-faire but to state action. He also criticised gender inequality, and supported the idea of world federation (den Otter 1996, chapter 3 and 2004). But there is no evidence that Ritchie engaged directly with Wells or Wells with Ritchie.

Ritchie died in 1903, which meant that, unlike Hobhouse and Hobson, he could at any rate only have read the very earliest of Wells's political and social writings. Hobson, unlike these others, undoubtedly did read Wells. Both he and Wells were notable internationalists, who welcomed the fact that, in their view, the forces of globalization were acting to unite disparate peoples by dissolving local and national identities (Iriye 2002, p. 54).⁶ In 1901, Graham Wallas (whose own connections with Wells will

⁶ In a rare comment on Hobson, Wells (1918, p. x) welcomed his book *Towards International Government* (1915) as 'a very sympathetic contribution from the English liberal left'.

be discussed below) noted having ‘an interesting talk with J. A. Hobson about Wells’ *Anticipations*’ at the National Liberal Club.⁷ In 1906 Hobson published an article on *A Modern Utopia* in the *Contemporary Review*. He focussed on the ‘Samurai’ idea, of which he was coldly dismissive: ‘regarded as an experiment in speculative politics Mr. Wells’ aristocratic scheme of government is defective in three respects. His aristocracy cannot acquire the power with which it is accredited, could not retain it if they got it, and could not exercise it without degrading both themselves and the subject populace’. Nevertheless, he also wrote that ‘Mr. Wells possesses one of the boldest, freest, best-informed and (to adopt his own favoured term) most “poietic” [i.e. creative] minds of our age, and I know of no book which would, in the hands of a capable master, serve so well as a text-book of general politics among persons capable of free thinking and really solicitous to understand the large and tangled issues of modern progress’ (Hobson 1906, pp. 497 and 487). (Hobson is likely to have approved in particular of Wells’s proposal that the state should guarantee a minimum standard of living to its citizens – Partington 2003, p. 58). In 1909, Hobson thanked Wells for a copy of *Tono-Bungay*, which he had already been reading in serial form in the *English Review*. ‘It is the finest piece of sociological fiction of our time’, he wrote. ‘You are massing many different forces against the citadel. But our amazingly cultivated obtuseness is a formidable defence’. He proposed meeting for a talk, although it is not clear if this took place, and social relations between them do not seem to have blossomed greatly, in spite of Hobson’s admiration for Wells’s writing.⁸

Wells’s relationship with the political scientist Graham Wallas was one in which there was a much more demonstrable mutual influence. Wallas was an Oxford man, but he had not come under the sway of Green’s idealist philosophy. By the end of 1900, he and Wells were acquainted, and they discussed topics such as ‘what shall the agnostic teach his child’.⁹ He thought *Love and Mr. Lewisham* ‘a rather deeply tragical little book’ and found that Wells’s fiction packed an emotional punch.¹⁰ He was also impressed by *Anticipations*. Wallas – one of the original Fabian

⁷ Graham Wallas to Ada Wallas, 25 November 1901, Wallas Family papers, Newnham College, Cambridge, 1/1/5.

⁸ Hobson to Wells, 12 February 1909, H. G. Wells Papers, University of Illinois, H-318. See also Betsy Hobson to Catherine Wells, 9 March 1909, Wells Papers, H-319.

⁹ Ada Wallas diary, 1 January 1901, Wallas Family Papers, 2/1/2.

¹⁰ Graham Wallas to Ada Wallas, 27 June 1900 and 16 March 1906, Wallas Family papers, 1/1/4 and 1/1/10.

essayists – co-sponsored Wells's Fabian membership in 1903, but himself resigned from the Society the following year, when he felt it to be taking too strong an anti-Liberal line. (It is reasonable to describe him, from at least this point on, as a New Liberal.) He and Wells took a walking holiday in the Alps in 1903. Their discussions helped provide the stimulus for *A Modern Utopia*, and the two men advised one another on the manuscripts of each other's books. In *Human Nature in Politics* (1908), Wallas paid tribute to Wells's 'sincere and courageous speculations', and the title of his book *The Great Society* (1914) may have been a nod to that of Wells's 1912 edited collection, *The Great State*. The two were agreed on the importance of education and had similar views on the waste and inefficiency of contemporary society. However, Wells came to view Wallas's approach as excessively academic, whereas Wallas was sceptical about the idea of rule by a quasi-Platonic elite, as represented by the 'Samurai' idea (Wiener 1971, pp. 5–9, 57, 77–9, 105, 107–8, 125, 130, 141–2; MacKenzie and MacKenzie 1973, pp. 168–9; Wallas 1908, p. 200).

It is also worth noting that Alfred Zimmern, who is credited with introducing the term 'welfare state' into English (in 1934), was inspired by Wells during the Edwardian period (Hennessy 1992, p. 121). Zimmern, an Oxford classical scholar, wrote to Wallas circa 1908 suggesting that Wells might be recruited to the cause of reform of the university:

An Oxford such as we want is just what he needs for the training of his samurai, and I know from what he said when he was there that he *does* believe in the future of the place (unlike [Sidney] Webb). If he could write for us and use his imagination to show people the future of Oxford at work, softening the bitter-nesses and reconciling the contradictions of a democratic state, it would be an immense stimulus.

The chapter on *Culture* in his American book [*The Future in America*, 1906] suggested this to me.¹¹

Nothing came of this idea, however, and Zimmern's later career, which was marked both by faith in the British Empire and antipathy to the discipline of science, shows few obvious traces of Wellsian influence (Toye and Toye 2007, Zimmern 1936). Yet this letter does demonstrate, if nothing else, that not all contemporaries were as dismissive of the Samurai idea as Hobson was. It also reinforces one's sense that Wells's Oxford links were stronger than his Cambridge ones, at least as far as Liberalism was concerned. Donald Markwell suggests that Keynes's views on 'racial

¹¹ Alfred Zimmern to Wallas, 14 July [1908?], Graham Wallas Papers, British Library of Political and Economic Science, 1/36/9.

wars, overpopulation generally, and eugenics' may have been influenced by Wells (Markwell 2006, p. 27). But the evidence for this is weak. Keynes does seem to have admired *The Time Machine*, but when he read *A Modern Utopia* in 1905 he merely observed that it 'rather peters out'.¹² Wells did have connections to young Cambridge socialists, including future Chancellor Hugh Dalton, but these are not of major significance for the history of pre-1914 welfare reform (Dalton 1953, pp. 74–5).¹³

These various intellectual similarities, interpersonal connections and hints and suggestions of influence are intriguing; but it is important not to blow them out of proportion. The main purpose of mentioning them here is to draw attention to the fact that readers of Wells would have been exposed to messages that were in important ways similar to those of the 'classic' New Liberal ideologues, at least some of whom were directly familiar with his work. This may help explain Liberal politicians' receptivity to Wells – which, as will be seen, was pronounced. Major figures within the Liberal Party found themselves in fundamental sympathy with many of his views, and at times were influenced by them. Churchill, Lloyd George, Masterman and Leo Chiozza Money are the main examples, but his opinions also attracted interest – if not always enthusiasm – in less likely quarters.

It is common knowledge that Churchill was an admirer of Wells's writings, and that the two men were friends. Their relationship has been traced in some depth, albeit with the main focus on personal rather than intellectual concerns (Smith 1989, pp. 93–116. See also Weidhorn 1992, pp. 25–30, 40–4). Paul K. Alkon (2006, pp. 167–8) does acknowledge that the men's 'views sometimes coincided', especially when it came to the impact of science on warfare, but he argues that this was 'a matter of imaginative affinities rather than influence'. Thus, although C. P. Snow was thinking of Churchill specifically when he made his remark about Wells having educated 'unlikely people', scholars do not seem to have picked up on his comment. And there has never been any explicit suggestion that Wells influenced Churchill's social thought. Yet, as will be seen, this was clearly the case. It is probable that their various public spats after World War I – most notably over British intervention in the Russian civil war – have distracted attention from Wells's earlier impact.

¹² In the 1930s, Keynes paid a generalised tribute to Wells, but made it clear that he did not think he had much worthwhile to say about economics. Keynes to G. L. Strachey, 8 July 1905, quoted in Harrod 1951, p. 106; J. Toye 2000, pp. 148–58, 160 n. 7; Keynes 1934, pp. 30–5.

¹³ Interestingly, Dalton cited Wells's view on inheritance in one of his budget speeches: see Dalton 1962, p. 116.

Churchill came across Wells's early works at around the time of their first publication. As he recalled in 1931: 'when I came upon *The Time Machine*, that marvellous philosophical romance [...] I shouted with joy. Then I read all his books'.¹⁴ At his death he had a substantial collection of Wells's novels, although *Men Like Gods* (1923), in which Churchill was satirised as 'Rupert Catskill', was missing.¹⁵ The first personal contact between the two came in 1901, when Wells's publishers sent Churchill a copy of *Anticipations*. Churchill, who had recently been elected as a Conservative MP, sent Wells a long letter in response. 'I read everything you write', he told him, and added that there was much in the book with which he agreed, although he felt that Wells put too much faith in government by experts and argued that society would not change as quickly as the book claimed.¹⁶ Early in 1902 the two men met at the House of Commons.

Their next significant recorded exchange was over *A Modern Utopia*. In the meantime, Churchill had joined the Liberal Party (in 1904) and had been appointed Under-Secretary for the Colonies in the new Liberal government (in December 1905). At this time, neither Churchill, nor any other minister, had a coherent, well-developed plan for state-sponsored social reform. During the general election of 1906, he spoke of the problem of poverty, and of how, paradoxically, 'great luxury' co-existed with suffering and 'waste'. He argued, though, that it 'was not possible by any mechanical state system to adequately deal with this question. The Lifeboat Service of the world was manned by the arms of men, and rescue work was voluntary'.¹⁷ A few months later, Churchill discarded this approach, having read *A Modern Utopia* in the meantime.

Wells, or his publisher, had sent him a copy of the book soon after it was published. However, Churchill did not find time to read it until his holidays in 1906. On 9 October that year he wrote to Wells about it:

You have certainly succeeded in making earth a heaven; but I have always feared that heaven might be a v[er]y dull place *à la longue*. Still there is so much in your

¹⁴ Winston Churchill, 'H. G. Wells', *Sunday Pictorial*, 23 August 1931, in *The Collected Essays of Sir Winston Churchill*, ed. Michael Wolff, 4 vols. (London: Library of Imperial History, 1976) III, pp. 50–4 at 52–3.

¹⁵ Martin Gilbert to Randolph Churchill, 27 July 1967, Randolph Churchill Papers, Churchill College, Cambridge, 1/2/30.

¹⁶ Winston Churchill to H. G. Wells, 17 November 1901, Wells Papers, C-238–3a.

¹⁷ 'In Angel Meadow', *Manchester Guardian*, 8 January 1906, reproduced in Randolph S. Churchill, *Winston S. Churchill, vol. II: Young Statesman, 1901–1914*, London: Heinemann, 1967, pp. 123–4. It should, however, be noted that Churchill had shown some interest in social reform during his earlier Conservative period.

writing that stimulates my fancy that I owe you a great debt, quite apart from the courtesy & kindness of your present. Especially did I admire the skill and courage with which the questions of marriage & population were discussed.¹⁸

Two days after writing to Wells, Churchill gave a speech in Glasgow (11 October 1906, in James 1981, pp. 105–11). In it he declared boldly that ‘The cause of the Liberal Party is the cause of the left-out millions’, and spoke of the need of the state to concern itself with the care of children, the sick and the aged. Like Wells, he used the terminology of evolution: ‘The existing organisation of society is driven by one mainspring – competitive selection’. There were also direct verbal similarities with Wells’s work. Some of these may have been no more than commonplaces. For example, Wells (1905a, p. 92) argued that ‘To the onlooker, both Individualism and Socialism are, in the absolute, absurdities [...] the way of sanity runs, perhaps even sinuously, down the intervening valley’. Churchill likewise noted that ‘It is not possible to draw a hard-and-fast line between individualism and collectivism’. There were also more striking similarities. Wells wrote: ‘The State will stand at the back of the economic struggle as the reserve employer of labour’ (*ibid.*, p. 141). Churchill said: ‘I am of the opinion that the State should increasingly assume the position of the reserve employer of labour’. Wells argued: ‘Whatever we do, man will remain a competitive creature [...] no Utopia will ever save him completely from the emotional drama of struggle, from exultations and humiliations, from pride and prostration and shame. [...] But we may do much to make the margin of failure endurable’ (*ibid.*, p. 139). Churchill said: ‘I do not want to see impaired the vigour of competition, but we can do much to mitigate the consequences of failure’. Furthermore, it may be significant that Churchill explicitly used the term ‘Utopia’:

I am sure that if the vision of a fair [i.e. beautiful] Utopia which cheers the hearts and lights the imagination of the toiling multitudes, should ever break into reality, it will be by developments through, and modifications in, and by improvements out of, the existing competitive organisation of society; and I believe that Liberalism mobilised, and active as it is to-day, will be a principal and indispensable factor in that noble evolution.

The Glasgow speech is generally seen as a landmark in Churchill’s thinking on social questions. Paul Addison has written that ‘Churchill had stumbled into a declaration of support for the New Liberalism’ (Addison

¹⁸ Winston Churchill to H. G. Wells, 9 October 1906, Wells Papers, C-238–2.

1992, p. 57). But he had not stumbled into it at all. He had been led into it, albeit by Wells rather than by one of the usual New Liberal suspects. As for Skinner's tests, the first is met, in that Churchill had read Wells. If Churchill's own testimony is accepted, then the second and even third conditions are also met insofar as we may infer from his letter that he found the ideas concerned in Wells and not elsewhere and did not arrive at them independently.¹⁹

Given Churchill's explicit approval of Wells's treatment of 'marriage & population' questions, it is possible that *A Modern Utopia* played a part in his becoming 'a strong eugenicist' (Blunt n.d., p. 399).²⁰ Wells had suggested that in Utopia people would only be allowed to have children if they met certain conditions, including physical fitness and financial independence. He implied that those who broke the rules would be subject to compulsory sterilisation, especially if 'if it is disease or imbecility you have multiplied' (Wells 1905a, pp. 182–3). Churchill was, of course, open to a wide array of intellectual influences and political pressures, and it is important not to overstate Wells's impact on him. All the same, on the evidence presented here, there seems to be a strong case for saying, at the very least, that Wells's ideas did have a significant direct effect on the way that he articulated his views on social reform during this formative period. If so, Wells's subsequent decision to support Churchill, rather than the socialist candidate, in the 1908 North-West Manchester by-election, is rendered more explicable. This is usually seen as a typically 'maverick' act on Wells's part, and personal considerations doubtless did play a role in it.²¹ Yet, as has been seen, he had good grounds for his claim that Churchill's mind was 'active and still rapidly developing and broadening' in line with his own views, even if his apparent hope that his ministerial friend would mutate into a socialist was far-fetched.²²

Lloyd George presents an equally interesting case, although a less clear-cut one. It is well known that Frances Stevenson, with whom he began a thirty-year affair in 1913, was much influenced by Wells, and perhaps especially by *Ann Veronica*, the story of an (at least ostensibly) liberated young woman. (Lloyd George, obviously, was not one to condemn

¹⁹ Of course, one might argue that Churchill could have exaggerated the book's influence on him in order to flatter Wells.

²⁰ Churchill's eugenic beliefs are well documented. See Addison 1992, pp. 123–6.

²¹ Smith 1989, p. 99. See also Radice 1984, p. 178, and Foot 1996, pp. 88–9. Anthony West (1984, p. 315), however, correctly notes Wells's view that Churchill was 'open-minded and educable'.

²² Wells, 'An Open Letter to an Elector in N. W. Manchester', *Daily News*, 21 April 1908.

Wells's private life.) As she wrote in her memoirs, 'I was exceedingly interested [...] in the emancipation of women, and Wells's contribution towards the breaking of the barriers which hitherto had hemmed us in and discriminated between the sexes appealed to me inevitably' (Lloyd George 1967, p. 36. See also Campbell 2006, pp. 7–8). Lloyd George was, of course, the beneficiary of this, in that, like Ann Veronica, Stevenson exercised her 'emancipation' by dedicating her life rather slavishly to the service of a Great Man. However, he undoubtedly had an independent interest in Wells's work. This is demonstrated by an entry in the diary of Lucy Masterman (wife of Charles Masterman) from December 1910, the year before Lloyd George met Stevenson. 'Wells came up into the conversation in connection with the many rumours about him lately, and Charlie described a party at Taplow where the whole company had cut him except [Arthur] Balfour'. She added: 'George admires Wells's writings tremendously. "He is the only writer whose opinions on politics interests me in the least", he said, "I think he is the greatest writer of today"'.²³ (Skinner's first test is thus passed, even if the others are not.) Other evidence suggests that this was more than a chance remark. In 1912, Charles Masterman told Wells that Lloyd George was continually reproving him for not arranging a meeting with him.²⁴ In November 1914, Stevenson recorded in her diary that 'We have both been reading Wells' last book *The Wife of Sir Isaac Harman* and C. [i.e. Lloyd George] thinks it is his most brilliant work' (Taylor 1971, p. 13, entry for 30 November 1914). (The lovers may have been attracted by the book's negative portrayal of the institution of marriage.) Wells and Lloyd George shared some views on policy, moreover. For example, they both favoured a census of national production; although, when Wells called for this in 1912, he overlooked the fact that Lloyd George had successfully introduced a bill for this purpose six years earlier (Wells 1912a, p. 25; Tooze n.d.).

The two men did meet, although it is not clear precisely when.²⁵ According to Lloyd George's son Richard:

I remember a wonderful little passage of arms between my father and H. G. Wells at home, with the great novelist and sociologist baiting L. G. over what he

²³ Lucy Masterman diary, 8 December 1910, Masterman Papers, University of Birmingham Special Collections, CFGM 29/2/2/2.

²⁴ C. F. G. Masterman to H. G. Wells, 'Sunday 25th' [1912], Wells Papers, M-228.

²⁵ Smith is a little vague, but appears to suggest that they met prior to 1914. Masterman, however, claimed to have introduced Wells to Lloyd George when the latter was Minister of Munitions (i.e., in 1915–16). Smith 1986, p. 114; Masterman, 1922, p. 595.

called the 'patchwork' economic policy of those former times – 'cutting a piece of the tail of the shirt to mend the hole in the collar'. H. G. was an excitable debater, and his thin pugnacious voice rose to a squeak of triumph as he out-Lloyded George in his own method of argument. (Lloyd George 1961, p. 86)

They had some further contacts, particularly after the latter's fall from power in 1922.²⁶ Wells wrote that he had 'a strong but qualified affection' for Lloyd George (Wells 1923, p. 71). But, as Stevenson noted in 1934, they never seemed 'really to hit it off when they meet. There is a clash of intellects, which is disappointing' (Taylor 1971, p. 286 – entry for 31 October 1934. See also Masterman 1922, p. 595). All the same, there seems no real reason not to take Lloyd George's remark to Lucy Masterman at face value. Given what we know of the latter's reading habits – he attracted the sobriquet 'the illiterate Prime Minister' because 'he never reads or writes' (Hendrick 1925, p. 371) – it is not difficult to believe that he should have preferred Wells's vivid style to that of, say, Hobson and Hobhouse. (Of course, he may well have picked up on these other men's ideas indirectly through conversations with his officials and others.) In other words, we should take seriously the evidence of Lloyd George's sympathy with Wells's ideas, even if we cannot trace their impact on him in detail. One might even say that his later record as Minister of Munitions (1915–16) – which demonstrated a belief that private businessmen could collaborate selflessly with the government in order to maximise production for the common good – was evidence that he shared Wells's vision of a 'Great State', distinct from conventional socialism, that would undertake national economic planning.

The man who introduced Wells to Lloyd George was Charles Masterman, who is himself generally seen as a significant New Liberal thinker. Masterman rose to prominence as a journalist and commentator and in 1903 became literary editor of the *Daily News*. He was elected to Parliament in 1906 and, as a junior minister after 1908, played an important role in the drafting of the National Insurance Bill. His enthusiasm for Wells, personally and ideologically, was manifest, as Wells scholars have noted (MacKenzie and MacKenzie 1973, p. 243; Smith, 1986, pp. 99, 113–14, 132, 202–4). However, the possible significance of this for the study of New Liberalism has been overlooked. Eric Hopkins's recent biography

²⁶ Wells to Lord Northcliffe, n.d., 1916, Northcliffe Papers, British Library, MS Add.62161, f. 95. For the later contacts see the correspondence in the Lloyd George Papers, Parliamentary Archives, London, LG G/19/19 and, in particular, Wells to Philip Guedalla, 7 February 1929, in Smith, *Correspondence* 3, pp. 288–9.

of Masterman mentions his friendship with Wells, but there is little suggestion in it of a significant intellectual relationship between them (even though Lucy Masterman's earlier book on her husband provides some important clues). Samuel Hynes, albeit only in passing, has emphasised the men's dissimilarity (Hopkins 1999; Hynes 1991; Masterman 1939, p. 68). Yet Masterman's and Wells's world-views overlapped to a great extent, as the former's advocacy of 'government by an aristocracy of intelligence' suggests (Masterman 1920, p. 213, quoted in Jackson 2007, p. 28).

Masterman read *Love and Mr. Lewisham* on first publication, and found it 'Good especially in some parts' and 'Sordid enough' (diary entry, 30 June 1900, in Masterman 1939, p. 34). His response to *Anticipations* was similarly ambivalent: he acknowledged Wells's 'profound insight' but, as a committed Christian himself, thought the book underrated the strength and value of religious forces in society (Masterman 1902, pp. 25). (That November, Beatrice Webb invited Wells to join the Co-Efficients, a cross-party dining club of which Masterman was a member – Seymour-Jones 1992, p. 260.) The following year, he made a first, unsuccessful, attempt at getting into the Commons, fighting a by-election campaign at Dulwich. In the course of doing so, he spoke to a group of local parents. He told Wells afterwards: 'I quoted freely in my lecture from your new book [...] and urged all the unhappy parents to read it'.²⁷ This book was *Mankind in the Making*, much of which focussed on the problem of education. Clearly, a poorly reported meeting with a tyro candidate was not as seminal as Churchill's Glasgow speech. But here was another clear example of a New Liberal politician absorbing parts of Wells's message and relaying them to the public.

By 1905 Masterman was describing Wells as 'that most courageous and individual of all social prophets' (Masterman 1905a, p. 320). He told him directly that he was one of the few men whose opinion he valued: 'I believe we have an enormous amount in common: and have felt again and again in reading your work – this is exactly what I have been wanting to say – and unable to say it'.²⁸ He found *A Modern Utopia* to be 'eloquent, provocative, and stimulating' (Masterman 1905b). A few months later he wrote: 'I have read – and I suppose all sensible men have read – all Mr. Wells's novels and social prophecies; and I should unhesitatingly affirm "Kipps" to be the best story he has yet given us' (Masterman 1905c). *Tono-Bungay* struck an even greater chord. In

²⁷ Masterman to Wells, 4 November 1903, Wells Papers, M-228.

²⁸ Masterman to Wells, 11 May 1905, Wells Papers, M-228.

1922, Masterman recalled reading the proofs on the train after visiting Wells at Folkestone: 'I could scarcely refrain from shouting out and brandishing it in the faces of the bewildered passengers, as I realised I had got hold of a masterpiece. I doubt if a year passes in which I do not read it again'.²⁹ Masterman wholly endorsed the book's satire of modern commercial values. His own work *The Condition of England* (1909), which criticised 'public penury, private ostentation', was peppered with references to Wells's work. (One commentator noted that 'The style of the book will often remind the reader of Mr. Wells; but Mr. Wells writes with more freedom and more enjoyment'.) Wells, in Masterman's view, successfully depicted a world that, although calm on the surface, was exhibiting fractures that portended cataclysmic change (Masterman 1909, pp. 25, 150, 234–7, 282–3; Kennedy 1912).

Wells later recalled that Masterman was one of those who stuck by him during the uproar provoked by *Ann Veronica*, which was denounced for its alleged immorality in *The Spectator* and elsewhere (Wells 1984 [1934], p. 471). Masterman wrote to him of *The New Machiavelli*: 'Whether in agreement or not, it is amazingly stimulating and interesting'.³⁰ All in all it was natural that, when Masterman was put in charge of British wartime propaganda, Wells was one of the authors he recruited.³¹ In a laudatory post-war assessment, Masterman said that he knew of no other modern writer who was 'so passionately disturbed by the fate of future generations'; Wells was listened to 'because men believe in his transparent sincerity and honesty'. By now, although his own religious faith was still firm, Masterman did not view Wells's scientific humanism as a major barrier to mutual understanding. He wrote: 'Mr Wells has seemed to have struggled towards a Gospel – clutching desperately at a faith by which a man can live [...]. He has refused to "put by" the burden of human destiny'.³² Masterman may sometimes have fallen short of the utterly slavish reaction to his books that Wells often seemed to require. But he was surely right to tell him – when he reacted badly to some mild criticisms – 'I think I have written more of praise and attempted interpretation of your work for nearly 20 years than any man alive'.³³

²⁹ Masterman 1922, p. 590.

³⁰ Masterman to Wells, 10 September 1910, Wells Papers, M-228.

³¹ Masterman 1939, p. 272.

³² Masterman, 1922, p. 597. For Wells's views see Glover 1972, pp. 117–35.

³³ Masterman to Wells, 10 December 1922, Wells Papers, M-228. Wells had objected to passages (pp. 178–83) in Masterman's book *England After War: A Study*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, n.d. (1922).

Of course, in his role as a journalist, Masterman read a lot of books and commended many of them, including, notably, those of E. M. Forster.³⁴ His praise of Wells was therefore not exactly unique, but its significance went beyond a merely literary judgement. As the episode of the 1903 Dulwich speech shows, Wells's views did have a direct impact on his public political message. Again, some of Skinner's tests are met, in whole or in part.

Another New Liberal figure with significant connections to Wells was Leo Chiozza Money, a radical author and journalist elected in 1906 as Liberal MP for North Paddington. Though neglected today, Money was a seminal figure in Edwardian political economy.³⁵ He did not hold office until World War I; his chief services to the Edwardian Liberal Party were as a publicist, but were none the less significant for that. He influenced Churchill's thinking on trade, and in 1912 Lloyd George thanked him for his 'magnificent service to the National Insurance Scheme'.³⁶ Asquith cited him as the foremost authority on the fiscal question.³⁷ His best-known work was *Riches and Poverty* (1905). This book provided a vivid statistical illustration of the stark inequalities of income distribution in Britain and impressed Wells as being 'extraordinarily valuable and suggestive' (Wells 1905c, p. 413). After its publication, the two men struck up a warm friendship, and Wells successfully urged Money to join the Fabians.³⁸ Money did not feel able to join Wells's agitation for the Society's reform; and, surprisingly for a Liberal MP, he was keener than Wells was on the idea of it organising a socialist political party.³⁹ But in 1908 – not long before his own resignation from the Society – Wells nominated him as a candidate for the executive; he was elected, and served for three years.⁴⁰ In 1909 Money told Wells that *Tono-Bungay* had 'delighted' him – although he criticised the scene in which

³⁴ Masterman's early reviews of Forster are regarded as insightful and important by a number of modern critics. He is also seen by some as an important influence on Forster. See, for example, Born (1992, pp. 141–59).

³⁵ A useful introduction to his career is Daunton 2004. However, Chiozza Money has not received the attention he deserves in the wider historiography.

³⁶ Toye 2007, pp. 27–9; Lloyd George to Leo Chiozza Money, 29 January 1912, Leo Chiozza Money Papers, Cambridge University Library, MS Add 9259/IV/37.

³⁷ 'The Coalition', *The Times*, 23 November 1912.

³⁸ Money, 'On the Brink', f. 378; Wells to Chiozza Money, 10 October 1906, Chiozza Money Papers, Add. 9259/IV/61.

³⁹ Money to Wells, 20 May 1907, Wells Papers, M-409.

⁴⁰ Wells to Edward Pease, 14 March 1908, Fabian Society Papers, A9/3/29; Pease, *History*, p. 286. Money served again in 1919–22.

George Ponderevo finally parts from Beatrice, his childhood sweetheart.⁴¹ (Masterman, by contrast, approved highly of the book's female characters.)⁴² In 1912 he contributed an essay to Wells's book *The Great State*. Like him, he feared that 'Without culture of a kind which is not now possessed even by our ruling classes' there was a risk that a socialist society would turn out to be nothing more than a 'Servile State'.⁴³ At the same time, he endorsed Wells's idea of 'The Great State', which, in Money's words, meant that 'the whole of the adult population should be organised to produce a high minimum standard of life, and that such organisation would yield to the whole community not only the materials of such a standard but a quality and degree of leisure and liberty at present undreamed of' (Money 1914, p. v).

Wells applauded Money's decision to resign from the coalition government at the end of the war, in protest at its decision to discontinue state control of the shipping industry.⁴⁴ Money fought the ensuing election as a Labour candidate but was defeated, and never sat in parliament again. During the 1920s he fell out with Wells, who disapproved of his outspoken support for Mussolini.⁴⁵ In his memoirs, he compared himself to Wells: 'It is ever those who delight in organizing society who are themselves the least amenable to discipline. For others, like H. G. Wells [does], I make far-reaching arrangements, but again like H. G., I do not love to be arranged!'⁴⁶ This may have been an oblique reference to Money's own chaotic private life. In 1928 he was acquitted of committing an indecent offence with a young lady in Hyde Park, but five years later he was convicted of indecently assaulting a woman in a railway carriage.⁴⁷ 'There was a time when our ideas were much in common', he wrote to Wells ruefully in 1934. 'Since then your voice has become a trumpet and mine a whisper.'⁴⁸ Again, there is a case for saying that Skinner's tests are met to some degree.

Another radical MP who liked Wells's work was Charles Trevelyan. Trevelyan was a member of the Rainbow Circle, a progressive discussion

⁴¹ Money to Wells, 18 February 1909, Wells Papers, M-409.

⁴² Masterman to Wells, n.d., 'Tuesday', c. 1909, Wells Papers, M-228.

⁴³ Money 1912, p. 101. Wells and Money owed the term 'servile state' to Hilaire Belloc. For Belloc's influence on Wells, see Toye 2008.

⁴⁴ Wells to Money, n.d., 1918, Chiozza Money Papers Add. 9259/IV/63.

⁴⁵ Money, 'On the Brink', f. 378; Money to Wells, 18 and 24 February 1927, Wells Papers, M-409.

⁴⁶ Money, 'On the Brink', f. 11.

⁴⁷ Dauntun 2004.

⁴⁸ Money to Wells, 6 November 1934, Wells Papers, M-409.

group that counted many New Liberals among its number. In 1905 he told Wells, whom he had previously met at the Webbs', that he had been reading *Anticipations* 'with a good deal of agreement and immense interest'.⁴⁹ Prior to 1914, Wells also received quite a warm reception from *The Nation*, a weekly paper that was one of the bastions of the New Liberalism. During his dispute with the Fabian Society, the paper praised the 'gallant endeavour of Mr. H. G. Wells and his reforming friends to pump oxygen into the body of Fabianism', whilst attacking the 'anti-democratic attitude' of Shaw and the Society's other leaders.⁵⁰ When Wells left the society, H. W. Massingham, the paper's editor, wrote to him: 'I'm sorry for progress and glad for literature you're out'.⁵¹ (Massingham had himself left the Fabians in 1893, at the same time as Ritchie).⁵² Although *The Nation* declined to serialize *Tono-Bungay*, Massingham read it 'with great interest & sympathy' and thought it provided a 'very remarkable' portrait of modern English life.⁵³ *The New Machiavelli* got a rather mixed review in the paper, but the reviewer did acknowledge that 'for a sketch of a profoundly uneasy society, conscious of its muddles and unable to see a way out', the book 'would be hard to beat'.⁵⁴ Wells's policy proposals also received serious consideration. In *The Great State* he proposed, in order to avoid one class of the community being condemned to act as a servile labouring class, 'a general conscription and a period of public service for everyone'.⁵⁵ *The Nation*'s reviewer expressed 'profound sympathy' with much of Wells's overall message, and found this solution to the labour question highly desirable: 'It is just, honest, and, on the face of things, technically feasible'.⁵⁶ Wells, prickly as ever, was not grateful for the review, as he thought it gave a misleading account of his earlier ideas.⁵⁷ Relations do not seem to have been permanently soured, though, as Wells attended the

⁴⁹ C. P. Trevelyan to H. G. Wells, 1 May 1905, Wells Papers, M-409.

⁵⁰ 'The Career of Fabianism', *The Nation*, 30 March 1907.

⁵¹ H. W. Massingham to Wells, n.d., 1908, quoted in Smith 1986, p. 110; Clarke 1978, p. 43.

⁵² Clarke 1978, p. 43.

⁵³ Massingham to Wells, 16 May 1907, H. W. Massingham Papers, Norfolk Record Office. It may have been Massingham who provided the paper's enthusiastic review: 'The Town of Vanity', *The Nation*, 13 February 1909.

⁵⁴ 'An Odyssey of Discontent', *The Nation*, 21 January 1911.

⁵⁵ He anticipated that this period would be short, perhaps a year: Wells 1912, p. 39.

⁵⁶ 'Pot-Shots at Utopia', *The Nation*, 15 June 1912. H. G. Wells to the editor of *The Nation*, published 12 June 1912, reproduced in Smith, *Correspondence* 2, pp. 327–8.

⁵⁷ Wells to the editor of *The Nation*, published 12 June 1912, reproduced in Smith, *Correspondence* 2, pp. 327–8.

paper's regular weekly lunch on at least one subsequent occasion (in 1913) (Havighurst 1974, p. 153).

Wells's belief that socialism was not 'a fundamentally different thing from Progressive Liberalism' may not have been wholly philosophically plausible.⁵⁸ But it clearly was true in practice that many progressive Liberals found Wells's own liberal version of socialism to be interesting and in many ways appealing. None of them accepted his policy plans lock, stock and barrel but, at the very least, he was recognised as a powerful social critic. In 1916, Wells told Lord Northcliffe that he had decided to write on the war in *The Daily News*, *The Daily Chronicle* and *The Nation* 'as I think those papers reach the doubtful "liberal" public which I can best influence'.⁵⁹ This belief may well have had some basis in his pre-war reception in some Liberal quarters.

Wells's views even won admiration from individuals within the Liberal Party whom one would not normally think of as 'progressive'. In May 1910, Wells endorsed Hilaire Belloc's harsh criticisms of the Prevention of Destitution Bill, which, although it had no hope of being passed, had been designed to implement Sidney and Beatrice Webb's proposals for the break-up of the poor law. 'It might be only too easy for such a measure to be used to replace the present pauper classes by classes of State labourers with an essentially servile status', he declared.⁶⁰ The same week he contributed a letter to the first issue of the official journal of the National League of Young Liberals, in which he emphasised that although he was known as a socialist he had 'never ceased to be a Liberal'⁶¹ John Burns, the insufferably complacent President of the Local Government Board, congratulated him on these 'first rate' interventions. 'The new helotry in the Servile State run by the archivists of the [London] School of Economics means a race of paupers in a grovelling community ruled by uniformed prigs', Burns wrote. 'Rely upon me saving you from this plague.'⁶² It was not only Wells's thinking on social problems that won him an audience in government. In 1913, J. E. B. Seely, the Secretary of

⁵⁸ H. G. Wells to Mr. Making (unidentified), 30 March 1907, in Smith, *Correspondence* 2, p. 144.

⁵⁹ Wells to Lord Northcliffe, n.d., 1916, Northcliffe Papers, British Library, MS Add.62161, f. 95.

⁶⁰ S. D. Shallard, 'Mr. H. G. Wells on the Prevention of Destitution Bill', *The Labour Leader*, 13 May 1910.

⁶¹ Wells's letter to *The Young Liberal* was reproduced in *The Manchester Guardian* on 14 May 1910.

⁶² John Burns to Wells, 16 May 1910, Burns Papers, British Library, MS Add. 46301, f. 121.

State for War, publicly commended a ‘very interesting’ series of articles by Wells, which opposed conscription and argued for more research to devise new military technology: ‘Mr. Wells pointed out, and he [Seely] believed truly[,] that victory in the future was not only going to be with those who produced great numbers of men, but with those who applied the best brains to the problem of war’.⁶³

One of the most interesting, and ambivalent, responses to Wells’s thinking came from J. A. Pease, the President of the Board of Education and an Asquith loyalist, in 1912. Wells had published a series of articles on ‘The Labour Unrest’ in the *Daily Mail*. He sought to diagnose the then-current wave of industrial discontent, which he attributed to the workers’ growing awareness of economic inequalities, spectacularly symbolized by the recent *Titanic* disaster, in which the Third Class passengers perished disproportionately. The articles called for a ‘National Plan’, ‘co-partnery’ between labour and employees in industry, ‘a compulsory period of labour service for everyone’, and argued for proportional representation for Westminster elections.⁶⁴ Pamela McKenna, the wife of the Home Secretary Reginald McKenna, sent the articles to Pease, and he read them whilst laid up after an accident. He wrote to thank her:

I read Wells’ articles this morning from 4.30 to 5.30 in bed. – I have a nasty feeling about him from his books & his views on your sex, – but I read all he says very carefully & my first impression was, a wonderfully brilliant diagnosis of the cause & reason of unrest – but I was awfully disappointed at his conclusions & his remedies.

He also cast doubt on Wells’s radicalism: ‘He claims to be a socialist, yet he realises men must have a self-interest in their own work for themselves, he even asks for royalties to be given them for further specialization by improvements in labour saving machinery’. Pease was unenthusiastic about the idea of proportional representation. And he criticised Wells’s argument for ‘co-partnery’ in industry not because the idea was too radical but because he himself, as an employer, had already tried such a scheme and found his employees indifferent to it.⁶⁵ (In some respects, Pease’s reaction

⁶³ ‘Colonel Seely on Mechanical Science in War’, *The Times*, 18 April 1913. The articles had been published in the *Daily Mail* on 7, 8 and 9 April.

⁶⁴ Wells 1912, pp. 21–7.

⁶⁵ Some other Liberal politician-employers promoted such schemes, although sometimes (as in the case of the shipping magnate Sir Christopher Furness) also without success. By contrast, the Labour politicians George Barnes and Keir Hardie were opposed to co-partnership. Pease to Pamela McKenna, 30 May 1912, Reginald McKenna Papers, Churchill College, Cambridge, MCKN 9/4; ‘The Failure of Co-Partnership’, *The Labour Leader*, 8 April 1910.

was similar to that of Masterman, who wrote to Wells that the articles were '*D -- d good in criticism -- quite the best stuff you have been doing -- [...] but yr. remedies leave me cold*').⁶⁶ It is intriguing that Pease – who has no great reputation as a radical – was apparently already familiar with Wells's work, and that he found his diagnosis 'wonderfully brilliant'. It is also interesting that Pamela McKenna thought he would find them worth reading, which raises the possibility that her husband had read them and thought so too.

Pease's comment about Wells's attitude to women was also significant, because this issue undoubtedly did have a negative influence on how some Liberals received the latter's ideas. Herbert Samuel, who held a variety of ministerial posts after 1905, later recalled the social ostracism to which Wells was subjected once his affair with Reeves became known. After that, Wells was no longer asked to Samuel's dinner parties at the House of Commons or at his house, 'and if one saw Wells in the street one passed him by'.⁶⁷ Nor did Samuel much relish the depiction of himself (as 'Lewis') in *The New Machiavelli*, though he thought the attack 'quite mild'.⁶⁸ Presumably, though, he would not have been inviting Wells to dinner parties in the first place, or accepting his invitations in turn, unless he had thought that he had some worthwhile things to say.⁶⁹ As for Lloyd George, we may deduce that Wells's critique of the constricting nature of conventional sexual values was an important part of the appeal of his work.

There is plenty of evidence, then, that many Liberals, and particularly 'advanced' ones, read Wells and engaged with his ideas. The level of that engagement varied substantially, from Churchill's actual borrowing of phrases to Pease's slightly puzzled interest. Of course, there were also some who were indifferent to Wells's thinking, or who at least left no record of their views. Asquith – an obviously important example – was introduced to Wells in 1902, but we do not know if he ever read any of his work.⁷⁰ Yet, although Wells's ideas clearly did not pervade the Liberal Party utterly, his

⁶⁶ C. F. G. Masterman to H. G. Wells, 'Sunday 25th' [1912], Wells Papers, M-228.

⁶⁷ Frank Singleton, record of a conversation with Herbert Samuel, 6 February 1939, Herbert Samuel Papers, Parliamentary Archives, London, SAM A/161.

⁶⁸ Herbert Samuel to Clara Samuel, 12 and 19 February 1911, Herbert Samuel Papers, SAM A/156/368–9.

⁶⁹ Herbert Samuel to Catherine Wells, 13 January 1908, Wells Papers S-028.

⁷⁰ MacKenzie and MacKenzie 1973, p. 171. In 1907, Asquith asked Pamela McKenna about Amber Reeves, who, he had heard, was 'much the cleverest & also the most beautiful' of her student cohort, '& like the majority of the best undergraduates, male & female, a strong Socialist'. We cannot be certain, though, that he ever learned of Reeves's affair with Wells. H. H. Asquith to Pamela McKenna 7 December 1907, McKenna Papers, MCKN 9/3.

influence does need to be taken seriously. In order to conclude this, we do not have to rely on inference, as is often the case, for example, when looking at the impact of Hobson and Hobhouse. It is certainly true that the ideas of these men and those of the politicians coincided closely.⁷¹ In the case of Wells, however, we can not only detect such intellectual similarities but also trace his direct influence with some precision.

What, then, was Wells's significance? It has always been difficult to show how shifting patterns of thinking amongst the 'opinion-forming intellectuals' actually translated into concrete political action on social reform.⁷² This applies to Wells as much as it does to the 'classic' New Liberals. Although we can sometimes demonstrate how he influenced the way particular politicians expressed themselves, we cannot attribute to him any given piece of legislation. Wells's true importance, then, may lie in his role as a populariser. Even if his ideas about welfare and social organisation were not themselves profoundly original, he communicated them brilliantly, often using innovative methods of presentation. Busy ministers may well have been disinclined to read heavy, theoretical works in their spare time. Although even Wells was sometimes too dry for them – Churchill's one criticism of *A Modern Utopia* was that he wanted 'more story' – he set out ideas in a highly accessible way.⁷³ Nor was Wells the only source of literary influence on New Liberal ministers. We might note, for example, Masterman may have been influenced by Forster; and that Churchill, when Home Secretary, had his interest in prison reform stimulated in part by John Galsworthy's play *Justice*.⁷⁴ (It might be interesting to consider the possible influence of George Bernard Shaw's plays too.)⁷⁵ Such writers may have tended to influence politicians' broad visions of society rather than their detailed policies, but they were not the less important for that. The lesson for the history of welfare may be that, in trying to explain how ideas were diffused, we need to look closely at society's informal public 'educators' as much as at its technically specialised intellectuals.

⁷¹ Clarke 1978, pp. 115, 117.

⁷² Freeden 1978, p. 2.

⁷³ Churchill to Wells, 9 October 1906, Wells Papers, C-238–2.

⁷⁴ Addison 1992, p. 113.

⁷⁵ Margery Morgan suggests that '*Major Barbara* and the policy of the (Royal) Court Theatre, where it was first staged [...] must be counted among factors in the climate of thought and feeling that led to a landslide vote for the Liberals in the 1906 General Election' (Introduction to the Penguin edition, London, 2000, vii). The play received its premiere in November 1905, days before the fall of Arthur Balfour's Conservative government. A line in Act I anticipates Churchill's oft-quoted remark that he was 'easily satisfied with the best'.

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